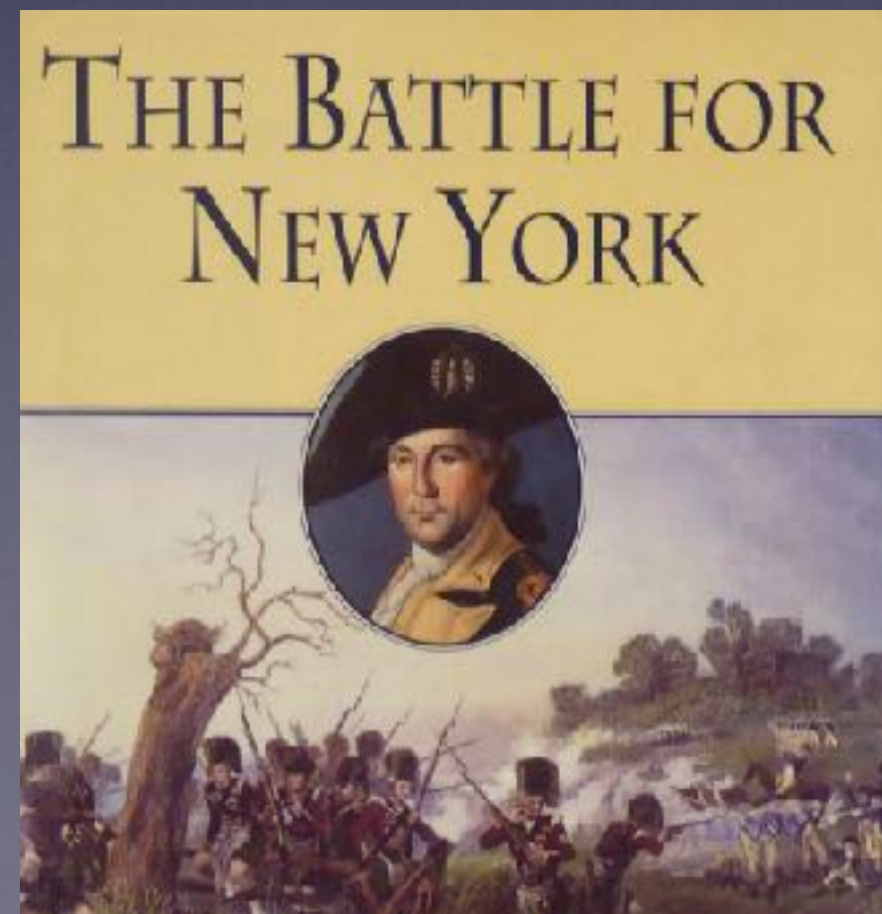




Major Battles of the Revolutionary War - Summary of Part 1

Marist College CLS, Spring-Fall 2023

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Phase 0,

**The French and Indian War
(1754 - 1763)**

Highlights of the French and Indian War

The French were encroaching on our western frontier with a series of forts that would span from Canada to their southern holdings in Louisiana. Washington was sent west (the Ohio Valley) by the Gov Fairfax of VA to negotiate a stop to it, but ended up starting a world war when his Native American interpreter killed the French negotiating Diplomat.

The British and Colonists won the resulting conflict, and France gave up control of their north American holding, but still remained in Canada. Great Britain made huge concessions to pacify them to make them peaceful allies (the Quebec Act), but the Colonists realized any hopes of expanding westward were now to be blocked forever! Expansion to the north was now stopped by Canada, and to the south by Spanish controlled Florida. The Atlantic Ocean stopped them expanding to the east. her future plans were in jeopardy.

The cost of the War was daunting, forcing Britain to plan to have the Colonist's pay for it out of new taxes, (ex: The Stamp Tax), but still without any representation back in Parliament. The Colonists were now "getting restless."

**Lexington
& Concord
(April 1775)**

**Bunker/Breed's
Hill
(June 1775)**

**The Battle
for Canada
(1775-1776)**

**Ending the Siege
of Boston
(March 1776)**

**Phase I,
the Start**

**The Battle for
New York
(August 1776)**

**The Battle
of Pelham Bay
(Oct 1776)**

**The Battle
of White Plains
(Oct 1776)**

**Valcour Island
(Oct 1776)**

Start of the Revolutionary War

This British taxation resulted in attacks on the offices of local Tax Collectors. In Boston that led to the infamous Boston Massacre, memorialized in Paul Revere's famous lithograph, where he renamed the Tax Office as "Butcher's Hall." It also led to Great Britain, in 1774, sensing the growing hostility, forbidding importation of all guns and gunpowder by the colonies. A year later, in 1775, they began the warrantless confiscation of privately held weapons. Things were indeed heating up when the MA colonists learned that their British appointed Gov., General Thomas Gage, was about to march on Concord to confiscate known cannons and gunpowder being legally stored there. The colonists realized that w/o weapons and ammunition, any further resistance would be impossible, leading us to:

Lexington and Concord: A short 12 miles from Boston, both John Hancock and Samuel Adams were said to be hiding in Lexington. Both wanted for sedition, the British wanted them punished. Firing started that day on the Lexington Green between the Redcoats and the patriots, but neither man could be located. Next stop, those cannons stored at Concord. Patriot militiamen were ready for them at the Old North Bridge and the two sides faced off against each other. April 19, 1775, signaled the official start of the Revolutionary War and is still celebrated in MA as "Patriot's Day." The British met heavy and growing opposition and retreated back to the safety of their Boston headquarters, empty handed, getting fired upon and losing men all the way back.

Start of the Revolutionary War (con't)

New military leadership arrived in Boston in the form of Generals Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne. Realizing that the Patriots already controlled Charlestown, Cambridge, and Dorchester Heights, Lord Howe was assigned the task of removing them from Charlestown. This led to the fighting at ...

Bunker/Breed's Hill: Originally planning to reinforce Bunker Hill, the patriots decided to move to Breed's Hill, closer to Boston and in better range of their smaller cannons. The confusion in naming the actual battle site continues to this day ! (Even some British maps of the day have the names confused !). The overwhelming British force carried the day, but only because the poorly supplied patriots had run out of ammunition. It took Lord Howe three very bloody charges up Breed's Hill to finally force the patriots to retreat, before returning to the safety of Boston itself. An eight month siege now began, with few either getting in or out of Boston.

The Battle for Canada: During the siege, Congress had authorized a plan to launch an attack on lightly held Canada and, if successful, add a 14th colony to America. General Richard Montgomery, filling in for the indisposed General Philip Schuyler, went up the Hudson and took control of Montreal. A second force, led by Benedict Arnold and rifle commander Daniel Morgan, took a poorly mapped path through the wilds of Maine to attack

Start of the Revolutionary War (con't)

Quebec. Sickness (smallpox), desertions, and a lack of supplies caused that part of the plan to fail, costing Montgomery his life, Arnold a shot in his leg, and Morgan to become a POW for 8 months when it failed. The Americans, or what was left of them, were recalled to return home when Congress learned of British reinforcement on their way to Canada and their plans to control Lake Champlain and occupy New York City.

Ending the Siege of Boston: The siege was a stalemate until a 25 year old civilian former bookshop owner, Henry Knox, suggested a plan to General George Washington, who had been appointed by the Continental Congress as Commander in Chief of the American Army. His plan: travel to Lake Champlain and arrange to haul the captured cannons from Ft Ticonderoga and Crown Point back to Boston and place them on Dorchester Heights, overlooking Boston and the British controlled harbor. Over sixty ton of various sized cannons (59 pieces) were successful transported by oxen and horse drawn sleds down today's Rt 9 and then east thru the Berkshire Mts, to be set in place overlooking Boston Harbor, forcing Lord Howe to admit defeat and leave America British-free as he headed up to Halifax for the next stage of the 8 year long war to begin, the attack and occupation of New York City itself.

Start of the Revolutionary War (con't)

The Battle for New York: In what would be the largest amphibious land invasion in history until D-Day of WWII, the British carried out the occupation of Staten Island from both Halifax and England itself, supported by rented soldiers from the King's cousin in Hesse-Casse Germany. From that point on, soldiers from any part of Germany would be called "Hessians." There was no resistance possible to this landing, as Washington was making his way south from Boston to organize resistance and set up defensive positions in both lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, not knowing where the eventual attack would take place. Once ready to begin, troop carriers and landing craft launched from Staten Island came ashore at Gravesend Beach in Brooklyn, and the invasion was on. It did not take long for the superior numbers of veteran British soldiers to find a weakness in the American lines at the easternmost Jamaica Pass, and outflank the unsuspecting and untrained American forces, backing them up helpless at the East River shoreline. Deciding to halt the action for the day, Lord Howe returned in the morning to find a miracle evacuation had been pulled off overnight by veteran seaman commander John Glover and his "Marblehead Mariners." Over 10,000 troops, cannon, and horses had successfully been ferried to lower Manhattan to continue the fight. A three week delay to discuss possible surrender terms failed, and the British resumed the offensive with a second amphibious attack, this time against Manhattan, at Kipps Bay (today's Stuyvesant Town).....

Start of the Revolutionary War (con't)

The Battle for New York (con't): The Americans, many of them simply poorly equipped and untrained militia volunteers, were driven uptown where a modest victory was gained by Washington at the Battle of Harlem Heights near today's Columbia University. Not able to withstand the more powerful British forces, Washington and his army escaped NYC heading north to White Plains, while John Glover, now for a second time, saved him with a defense at

The Battle of Pelham Bay: We know it today as Orchard Beach, Bx, where Glover's men gave Washington four extra days to prepare defenses at White Plains, all the while inflicting more casualties than in all of the earlier fighting in NYC, before heading north himself to rejoin the main Patriot army.

The Battle of White Plains: Although almost equal in numbers, the Americans were once again unable to stand up against the veteran and better equipped British forces, and withdrew to cross the safety of the Hudson River to NJ, while the main British force returned to NYC to force the surrender of 3500 Americans ordered to remain to hold Ft Washington in upper Manhattan (today's location of Ft Tyron Park). Washington, with what remained of his army, now abandoned the useless sister fort of Ft. Lee, NJ, and began the long march south, defeated, thru all of NJ to the safety of PA, running to escape the troops led by General Cornwallis trying to end the war here once and for all. Meanwhile, up in the Adirondaks, another British force out of Canada was planning to take control of Lake Champlain.

Start of the Revolutionary War (con't)

The Battle of Valcour Island: Also called the Battle for Lake Champlain, Sir Guy Carlton, the British Gov of Canada, was leading a naval force to take back Ft Ticonderoga and regain control the Lake while supplying additional manpower to aid the British plan to take Albany, control the Hudson River, and starve New England into submission. Those plans hit a major obstacle when faced by a surprising naval force that had been built under the supervision of none other than Benedict Arnold, still recuperating from his leg wound received in Canada. Not able to defeat the much more powerful British naval force, Arnold's little navy escaped to hide behind Valcour Island until discovered, when, faced with the possibility of the British capturing their ships intact, they burned and sank their fleet rather than surrender it. Seeing the strong American defenses at both Ft Ticonderoga and the nearby Ft Independence, Gov Carlton decided to turn around and retreat back to Canada, an action that provided the Americans almost one more full year to plan for what would be the successful defense of Albany at the Battle of Saratoga.

Meanwhile, Washington, having reached northern PA, was planning what would be his only major victory of that entire year (1776), a water crossing of the Delaware River led by our Marblehead Mariner once again, John Glover, on Christmas Eve, to surprise the Hessian outpost in nearby Trenton, NJ.....

**Battles of
Trenton (12/1776)
and Princeton (1/1777)**

**The Raid on
Danbury (4/1777)**

**Phase II,
Not so Fast, King**

Not So Fast, King....

The Battles of Trenton (12/1776) and Princeton (1/1777):

The stories of the Hessians being drunk celebrating Christmas Eve are untrue legends. That was never the case. Much more believable was a story that the Hessians had, via an informer or possibly a deserter or spy, was warned that the Americans were preparing an attack that day, and to be on guard for it. By coincidence, early that day, a scouting force of Americans HAD been sighted by the Hessians and quickly scared away. As a result, the Hessian commander felt the danger had passed, and took down his level of watchfulness. The danger was now over, he incorrectly thought. There is an interesting side story about Washington offering his artillery master Henry Knox “400 men, useless to me, as they came to camp w/o muskets to shoot !” Knox grabbed them and created a new type of soldier “artillery w/o cannons.” He issued them ropes, spikes and mallets, and instructed them to use the ropes, when possible, to steal away Hessian cannons, but if caught, to make them temporarily inoperable by driving the spikes into the firing touch holes, then snapping them off with the mallets to prevent easy extraction. The raid was a success, and was Washington’s first real victory of the entire year. A moral boost for the nation, supported even more by the publishing of Thomas Paine’s famous “American Crisis”, with its inspiring theme of “These are the times that try men’s souls.....”. Finally, there was positive news to encourage greater enlistments for the army. In the action, the Hessian commander, Col Johann Rall, was mortally wounded, even after Washington assigned his personal surgeon to attend to his wounds.

Not So Fast, King....

Two great resources exist to read further details:

a) the pertinent “Crossing the Delaware” chapter of the late David McCullough’s “1776”, and
b) David Hackett Fisher’s “*Washington’s Crossing*”; an extra treat here is his preface, where he devotes a full explanation of the famous painting by Emil Lutze that now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, detailing person by person who Lutze was depicting in it. A lot of poetic license, but inspiring all the same. History is fairly certain that Washington did NOT stand up for the trip across, and most probably was on a flat bottom barge or ferry, and not in a Durham boat as depicted by the artist. When you visit the Met, ask a docent to point to to you one or more of Lutze’s trademark “dates” indicating when he worked on *that* particular portion of the painting ! It’s a great way to share it later with friends..... (if you write me to ask, I can send you copies of examples I photographed once they were made known to me !).

With this great success to his credit, Washington pushed ahead to begin the year 1777 with a follow-up victory over a British occupied College of NJ (today’s Princeton U). These back to back battles drove almost all the British presence from New Jersey, providing America with a huge moral boost after earlier suffering the total loss and British occupation of NYC.

It was just a few months later the British Gov of NY, Lt Gen William Tryon (think: Ft Tryon Park in Manhattan) decided to level the patriot storehouse at Danbury, CT

Not So Fast, King....

The British raid and destruction of Danbury, CT: A local story, to be sure, with little impact on the outcome of the war, but an illustration of how even small local communities were impacted by the fighting that was going on, and suffered as a result. Danbury was a known Patriot supply storehouse, and as we saw at Concord, and will see again at the Battle of Bennington, VT, (as a prelude to Saratoga). The British wanted those supplies out of the hands of those they considered “rebels”. Gov Tryon in nearby NYC decided it was time to teach these Colonists a lesson from their King, and carried out a devastating raid on that community in April of 1777. Although not a witness to the actual attack, our young hero who was documenting much of his 8 years in the army, Joseph Plumb Martin, was taking notes. His CT regiment of Regulars (Continental soldiers, not just local militia volunteers) arrived on site after it was over and he well documented what he saw with his own eyes, concluding with his words about the British attack when he said “they had fully accomplished their objectives”, or words to that effect. The heroism of a young girl, a 16 year old teenager, Sybil Ludington, and the patriotism and civil contributions of her father, Militia Col Henry Ludington, commanding a Dutchess County regiment, are the reasons the location of their home and mill are remembered to this day by a marked exit on Interstate Rt 84, *Ludington Road*. When word reached the Col of the British attack and a desperate need for assistance, it was young Sybil who made a 40 mile horseback ride that very evening to notify her father’s officers to gather their men and assemble at the Colonel’s home the next day to march to the defense of the now burning Danbury. It was a risky task for anyone, especially a defenseless 16 year old girl in an area with very mixed allegiances to their King and others with a strong desires for Independence.

Not So Fast, King....

The British raid and destruction of Danbury, (con't):

..... As the eldest of her siblings, there was little hesitation in her volunteering, and she accomplished the task. By the time Sybil arrived back home that next morning, her father's militia troops were already assembling on their front lawn, today just yards away from that Rt 84 exit. It was those troops, plus others who had similarly been called to action to march to Danbury, that forced the British to call short their efforts, with a short stop for more mayhem at Ridgefield, CT. That was on their way back to board their troop ships waiting at Compo Beach near Westport, on Long Island Sound, for their return sail to the safety of NYC. Even today, the seal of Danbury, CT recalls that event with the words, in Latin, saying "We are Restored."

This is where we ended Part 1 of this two part program. We will begin part two with the Battle of Brandywine, the site of General Lafayette getting wounded for the American cause, and Washington's loss that opened the road for the British to take our capital city, Philadelphia, forcing Congress to flee to a new temporary headquarters.

Concluding Part 1....

Then, as a prelude to the turning point fight at Saratoga, we will cover the inspirational Battle of Bennington, the fight that brought our Bunker Hill hero, John Stark, out of retirement for the sake of his country in need, aided by several hundred NH volunteers who would sign on for 40 days of volunteer service to be led by, and some to die for, their own personal hero, now a NH General.

With the French now officially our allies, the British decided to evacuate the non-strategic occupation of Philadelphia to return to NYC, should the French be convinced to assist Washington's dream to retake that city, once his own HQ's. The Battle of Monmouth Courthouse would result, as Washington harassed the British on their way back north to NYC. That would become the war's largest land battle in the north, and would see the strange General Charles Lee embarrass himself and lose any chance of leading troops in the future. He would eventually be fired by a Congress fed up with his attitude and insults.

Here's a look at where we'll be heading from here.....

Done:

Battles of Trenton and
Princeton (12/1776; 1/1777)

The Raid on
Danbury (4/1777)

Remaining:

Brandywine/Philadelphia
Our Capital City Falls
(9/1777)

Phase II,
Not so Fast, King

The Battle of
Bennington - 8/1777

The Battle of Saratoga
9-10/1777

Battle of Monmouth
6/1778

Concluding with Phase III....

Then we'll head down south, for a totally different kind of fight, made necessary after our twin army defeats at Charleston and Camden, SC.... It would now be a guerrilla war, led by a new troop commander, Nathanael Greene, in what was called "The War of the Posts," bleeding all Southern loyalist strongholds and then disappearing before British reinforcements could arrive to put an end to this upstart Quaker, Greene, and his local militia supporters. Look at the list of battles we will study in this new form of warfare for the Colonists, one that would "bleed the British and their Loyalist supporters, but don't let them catch us." Take a look at the many skirmish site names that will surely be unfamiliar to you, but were a big reason for the British, after a long 8 years, finally saying "***ENOUGH !!!***"

(Phase 1 - the Start)

(Phase 2 - Not so Fast, King)

Phase III:

The Fighting Heads South

Moore's Creek
(2/1776)

Sullivan's Island
(6/1776)

Savannah
(12/1778)
(9/1779)

Charleston
(5/1780)

Phase III:
The Fighting Heads
South

Waxhaws
(5/1780)

Camden
(8/1780)

Kings Mt
(10/1780)

Cowpens
(1/1781)

Guilford Courthouse
(3/1781)

Hobkirk Hill
(4/1781)

Ninety Six
(5-6/1781)

Eutaw Springs
(9/1781)

Siege of Yorktown
(9/1781)

Concluding with Phase III.....

So, we've got our work cut out for us, but get set for an exciting lesson in what our Revolutionary War was really like ! It wasn't an accident that it took us eight years to get it finished and agree to Peace terms with Great Britain.

Enjoy your summer vacations, perhaps pick up a book or two I listed on the bibliography on our CLS website, and, like the title of the old *Rock and Roll* song of OUR era says,

“See you in September !” when classes resume.

Stay safe, be well,

Bob U.